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Error in Court Breaks Secrecy

After Agent's Long Dead, CIA Link Is Acknowledged

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The U.S. government has publicly acknowledged that Tucker Gougelmann, who died in a Communist Vietnamese prison some time after June 1976, had been a Central Intelligence Agency employee.

The acknowledgement, made in U.S. District Court in Alexandria, Thursday was a slip of the tongue. Assistant U.S. Attorney Frank W. Dunham, Justice Department officials said, had not intended to mention Gougelmann's name.

And, as it developed, the cable that was being discussed at the espionage trial of Ronald L. Humphrey and David Truong did not connect the CIA and the dead man.

Tucker Pierre Edward Power Gougelmann was buried last Oct. 28 at the age of 59 with simple military

honors in Arlington National Cemetery. It was assumed by those who knew him that Gougelmann had spent 25 years as a CIA officer, but even after he died CIA spokesmen would not acknowledge Gougelmann's agency connection.

WHEN HE RETIRED as a GS-18 senior officer of the CIA in 1972, the agreement was that he was leaving under the covert category. This meant the agency would not acknowledge him unless he himself wanted it done.

He missed the last boat out of Saigon in 1975 after going there to try to get his five Vietnamese children out of the country during the last agonies of the Hanoi victory.

There was no question about why Gougelmann was buried with honors in Arlington. He was a World War II Marine who served 10 years in the South Pacific, China and Europe before retiring on disabilities suffered in the battles at Makin and Munda.

In those days, Gougelmann was a recruiting poster Marine and his photo was used on war bond billboards and in morale-boosting magazine ads. Later in the war he was with the OSS and this naturally led him into the then-new CIA.

GOUGELMANN'S two marriages with American women failed, and he entered into marriage contracts with two Vietnamese women, according to his lifelong friend, June Brygider of Indialantic, Fla.

He started a firm called Associated Consultants in Bangkok, Thailand, and Saigon, with interests in rebuilding the wartorn country, oil exploration, industrial and agricultural development and a retirement farm on the tourist island of Phu Quoc.

When the fall of South Vietnam was imminent in April 1975, Gougelmann returned to Saigon close down his business and to evacuate the children. The Communists arrested Gougelmann on June 11, 1975 and confined him in the notorious Chi Hoa jail.

Gougelmann was last seen alive in June 1976 by a visitor to the prison. The Vietnamese said Gougelmann died of natural causes but the Americans who received his body rejected that explanation. The death certificate says that the cause and date of his death is unknown.